

Family and Community Circle



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NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION NEWSLETTER

Back to School Tips FOR PARENTS

By Sandy Vorenksy, Middlesex County Teacher of the Year

As a new school year begins and Meet the Teacher Night draws near, I generally prepare a list of resources that parents can access to support their child's learning in the classroom. I usually share ideas to promote modeling academic, textbook math in real life situations. Although my target audience is middle school, these tips can be easily modified and applied to other grade levels. Topics vary, but focus on math with an interdisciplinary flair.

Easy Back to School Tips for Parents - Topic: Estimation

- **Travel Time:** Have your child estimate how much time it will take to travel from home to either school or an extra-curricular activity. Compare the estimation to both the actual time and the time projected on either the GPS device or an online site like MapQuest. Was this exact or an over or under estimate, and by how much time (or percent of an hour)? How does the distance traveled compare to the time it took to arrive at a destination?
- **Lunch:** Use this opportunity to have your child estimate the cost of lunch and then calculate the actual cost. Discuss comparing costs of bringing versus buying lunch and unit pricing.
- **Locker Design:** Here are two different ideas to try at home!
 1. If your child is planning to decorate a locker this year, have her/him estimate how much space (in inches) each item will take up in the locker and then measure the items to see if they fit. If your child enjoys planning and drawing, use basic grid (graph) paper to have your child first estimate then draw the locker, including the contents inside. Measure for accuracy and to check to see if everything fits in the locker!
 2. Use this opportunity to make the connection between real life budgeting and adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing decimals. Plan with your child a budget for spending on school supplies. Have your child use prices from circulars to estimate the total cost of getting ready for school. Have your child calculate the actual cost and compare and discuss the estimation. Have your child estimate and calculate discounts and sales tax as well.
- **Study Time:** Have your child figure out a 'time budget.' Students first estimate how much time it will take to complete homework and then track how much time in a week is spent studying.

Is there a difference depending on the day of the week? Discuss the value of estimating when planning activities.

For information about estimation and other math topics, click here:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/parents/articles/tips/scimath.htm>

National PTA Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Resources

The National PTA (<http://www.pta.org/>) website has a wealth of resources available to parents and families to enhance understanding of the new CCSS. One such resource is their Parents' Guide to Student Success (<http://pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>) that will help you as you continue to support your children in the CCSS in English language arts and mathematics. The guide provides examples of the type of material children may learn at each grade level.

This guide includes:

- Key items that children should be learning in English language arts and mathematics in each grade (<http://www.pta.org/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2909>)
- Activities that parents can do at home to support their child's learning
- Methods for helping parents build stronger relationships with their child's teacher
- Tips for planning for college and career (high school only)





FAMILY and COMMUNITY CIRCLE

A Child's First Teachers

By Dr. Felecia Nace, Office of Strategic Communications & Partnerships

Family members are a child's first teachers. Every educator recognizes the important role family members play in a child's development, and educators appreciate the time and attention that families dedicate to their children. When children are young, everything they learn to do is a learning process, such as learning to walk and talk. Family members applaud young children when they take their first steps and families witness the delight on a child's face when they are greeted with applause for accomplishing even the simplest tasks. Families learn that encouragement is extremely important. However, as children grow older, some families forget the importance of working through challenges alongside their children. Do you remember when your child first learned to walk? One step led to another. Sometimes they fell down but often family members were there to support them and help them get back up.

Children need similar encouragement long after they've learned to walk on their own and tie their shoes properly. In elementary school, middle school, high school, and even college, family support is necessary for student success. Support can occur in many ways. No matter what your child's age, here are a few simple suggestions that you can use to support him/her:

- Ask your child's teachers how you can help your child at home. Don't wait until your child is experiencing difficulty in classes. Early intervention is best when children face learning challenges.
- What did you learn at school today? This is a great question to ask your child at the end of each day. It is a way to stay current about what is occurring in school on a daily basis.
- Attend PTA/PTO meetings and parent-teacher conferences regularly.
- Keep an open line of communication with your child's teachers throughout the school year. Emailing is a great way to stay in touch.
- Stay informed. Be sure to consistently check your child's school website for updated information.
- Keep your child in a positive frame of mind. Encourage them each morning to do their best in school.

As children grow, they need family guidance even more, especially given the social, emotional, and academic challenges they face as they move toward adulthood. The beginning of each school year is a great time to vow to find innovative ways to stay involved in your child's schooling and help your child make good choices as they navigate through a new year.

Here are some links to additional information you may find useful:

- Common Core State Standards/Model Curriculum—Know what is expected of your child:
Click here: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/>
- Parent-teacher Conference Tips
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/parents/articles/ParentTeacherConferenceTips.htm>
- National PTA website
<http://pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>



Bullying Prevention Activities Parents and Children Can Do Together

Starting a new school year provides a great opportunity for parents to begin activities that they can continue throughout the school year with their children designed to help them develop empathy, respect for others and positive problem-solving skills, including the following:

- Perform community service—Participating in community service with your children can help them to better understand people of different backgrounds, abilities, ethnicities, ages, educations and income levels. Consider having your children volunteer with an organization that focuses on servicing certain groups that are commonly misunderstood or harassed by others.
- Watch films that discourage prejudice—Watching films with your children on the harmful effects of racism, homophobia, sexism and other forms of prejudice throughout history can help your children develop empathy and discourage them from bullying others. Watching these films may help children who have been bullied to identify with other groups that have been mistreated. Many films that address these issues can be found at the public library.
- Read books or other literature that discourage prejudice—Similar to watching films that address the prejudice many groups have faced, reading books on this topic can help your children develop empathy and discourage them from bullying others. Books that deal with prejudice should be available at school and public libraries.
- Visit museums and attend educational events on social issues—Taking your children to museums or educational events with exhibits that focus on social issues, such as poverty, civil rights and prejudice, can help your children to better understand the lives and struggles of others. Many local community organizations, governments and public universities also regularly hold panels, workshops and other events on past and current social issues that are open to the public.
- Keep your family up-to-date on current events—Watching the news, reading the newspaper and engaging in other activities that help your children stay up-to-date on current events can have many benefits. Talking about the events and discussing the behavior seen can help to teach the behavior you want to see from your children.

Parent Involvement in AchieveNJ

The Division of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (TLE) focuses on what it takes to attract, develop, and retain a world-class corps of educators. This involves creating policies and programs to support teachers and leaders throughout their entire lifecycle as educators – recruiting and preparing strong candidates, supporting them as they grow to reach their full potential, and working to retain them in the profession and the state. We aim to create the environment for districts to provide an excellent education for all students in a way that complements local leaders in making local decisions.

Much of the recent media attention centers on AchieveNJ, New Jersey's new educator evaluation and support system. As AchieveNJ rolls out statewide, the Department is committed to providing continued support for implementation. Since March, staff from the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Evaluation have traveled across the state to meet with thousands of educators – answering their questions and sharing more information. In the coming school year and beyond, we will continue to learn from final pilot reports and from all districts to continue to improve our policies and supports. Each district is required to convene a District Evaluation Advisory Committee (DEAC), and a parent must be included as a member of this committee. If you are a parent who wishes to become more directly involved with improved evaluations, please contact your district leadership to inquire about the DEAC.

In addition to evaluation improvements, the TLE Division is focused on the other critical issues impacting educators. Over the past several months, the State has been developing a series of initiatives intended to raise the bar to enter the education profession and proposed a related regulatory package to the State Board on June 5. Updated regulations for certification and professional development have been officially adopted to align with the TEACHNJ law. We are continuing to work with educators, organizations, parents, and national and state leaders to improve our supports to educators. Parents are critical to this effort, and we invite you to stay informed. For more information or to provide feedback, please consult the following:

- **Recruitment, Preparation, and Recognition:**
 - <http://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/rpr/>
 - rpr@doe.state.nj.us
- **Licensure and Certification:**
 - <http://www.state.nj.us/education/educators/license/>
 - (609) 292-2070
- **Evaluation:**
 - <http://www.state.nj.us/education/AchieveNJ/educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us>
- **Professional Development:**
 - <http://www.state.nj.us/education/profdev/>
 - teachpd@doe.state.nj.us



Free Online Courses for Parents

By Sue Sullivan, Office of Curriculum and Standards and Educational Technology

I've always believed that you are winning until you quit, and that you are old when you want to stop learning new things. When children see parents and guardians continuing to learn and grow, it demonstrates to them that learning is a lifelong process. If you have ever wanted to enhance your knowledge of specific topics but were simply too busy to follow through, there are free websites that I have found useful to educate myself on a variety of subjects. These sites will allow you to access information at your own pace and begin fulfilling your learning curiosity. I have shared a site below that lists 20 different websites offering thousands of free online courses on many topics. Please note that these are my personal recommendations, and the New Jersey Department of Education does not specifically endorse the website(s) listed. Enjoy!

20 Places online to educate yourself for free
<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/productivity/20-places-educate-yourself-online-for-free.html>

STUDENTS SPEAK OUT: VOTE 2013

This fall, the State House Tour Program will be sponsoring "Vote 2013," a statewide mock gubernatorial election program for New Jersey students in grades 4 through 6.

Teachers will receive lesson plans and information explaining the election process in New Jersey. Participating students can cast their votes for the next governor and see the results on the legislative web page on November 6th. This program is free. Families can visit the Legislature's website at

<http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/kids/teacherindex.asp>, or call the Tour Office at 609-847-3150 any time after September 30, 2013 for more information.





Apply to the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program for the 2014-2015 School Year!

Applications are due December 2, 2013. Information on available choice districts, the application process, and district contact

information can be found on the Department's website: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/choice/>.

New Jersey's Interdistrict Public School Choice Program enables approved choice districts to enroll students who do not reside within their districts without cost to their parents. The program increases educational opportunities for students and their families by providing students with school options outside of their district of residence and giving parents the power to select a school program that best serves their child's individual needs.

District participation in the program is optional. Once approved, the choice district designates the available seats in specific grades and programs that are open to choice students. Where choice options are available, any student who resides in New Jersey is eligible to apply.

The Interdistrict Public School Choice Program benefits students and parents, as well as the choice districts. Many choice districts have established specialized and innovative programs and courses that focus on areas such as art, music, foreign languages, and technology, and are open to students who demonstrate an interest in the special programs. Opening enrollment to students outside the district can bring in more students interested in taking advantage of these special programs and courses, allowing both the programs and students to grow and flourish.

For more information on Interdistrict School Choice, visit our website: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/choice/>.

FAQs:

Q: Where can I find a Student Application for Enrollment in a Choice District?

A: Each choice district prepares and provides its own Student Application. Contact the individual district to which you wish to apply to obtain an application.

Q: If my child applies to a choice district this fall, when will he or she actually begin school in that district if accepted?

A: For applications submitted by December 2, 2013, students will begin in the choice district in the 2014-2015 school year. It is important to note the steps and timelines for this process to ensure that your child is eligible and applies in time.

Q: Can a choice program use criteria for enrollment that is based on student performance, including test scores or grade point?

A: A choice program cannot discriminate in admission policies on the basis of intellectual aptitude, athletic ability, English language proficiency, status as a handicapped person, or any basis prohibited by State or federal law. However, if a Choice district limits admission to a special choice program with a particular area of concentration, it may evaluate prospective students using enrollment criteria as long as such criteria does not discriminate between choice and resident students, is proven to be justifiable for the specific program, and has been approved by the Department of Education.

Q: Is my Resident district obligated to guarantee my child transportation if our choice district is within 20 miles of our residence?

A: Your Resident district is obligated to provide either transportation or aide in lieu of transportation. Physical transportation will be provided unless the annual cost exceeds \$884. If the transportation costs more than \$884, you are given two options: 1. you may choose to accept \$884 as aide in lieu of transportation and take responsibility for your child's transportation, or 2. you can pay the Resident district the additional cost above \$884 and get transportation provided by the district. Please be aware that you will not receive the Resident district's confirmation regarding transportation until August 1, 2014.

Compiled by Cynthia Bucchi,
Office of Strategic Communications & Partnerships

The Office of Strategic Communications and Partnerships is responsible for responding to questions from families and community members who write to "Ask DOE" and choose the topic "Other." We have compiled some of the recent frequently asked questions received from across the state. If you are interested in writing to "Ask DOE" please visit our web page at the following address:

<https://www.state.nj.us/education/parents/contact.htm>.

Question: How do I register my child in school?

Answer: The process for registering a student in school comes under the purview of each school district. For contact information, you can click here to use our NJ School Directory: <http://education.state.nj.us/directory/>.

Question: What is the NJ school attendance policy? Please define an excused absence and unexcused absence.

Answer: Policies on attendance come under the purview of individual boards of education, and are commonly found in student handbooks published by the school. Local boards of education must adopt policies and procedures regarding attendance of students in accordance with N.J.A.C. 6A:16-7.8. You can read more by visiting our web site at the following address: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap16.pdf>.

Question: What are the requirements for students to be able to take a school bus?

Answer: In accordance with state law, N.J.S.A. 18A:39-1, all public elementary school students (grades K-8) who live more than two miles from their school and all public secondary school students (grades 9-12) who live more than two-and-a-half miles from their school are entitled to transportation. These students are said to live "remote from school." Whenever a school

district is required to provide transportation to students attending regular public school programs, students attending nonpublic schools who meet those distance requirements may also be entitled to transportation services. In addition, any student classified with special needs who either meets these distance requirements or for whom transportation is required in the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) must be transported.

WELCOME BACK!
WE HOPE YOU HAVE A SUCCESSFUL AND FULFILLING YEAR!